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## Books

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**COSTA RICA [:] THE ECOTRAVELLERS' WILDLIFE GUIDE.** Les Beletsky. 1998. Natural World/ Academic Press, San Diego, California. xii + 426 pp. + 80 color plates by Priscilla Barrett, David Beadle, David Dennis and John Myers. \$27.95 U.S.; \$38.95 Can.

This field guide deals less with putting names on various animal species than with giving the traveller an insight into the natural history of this diverse Central American country. The author makes an easy read of a discussion of the geography, climate and habitats, with line drawings of various representative plants. He introduces the reader to some of Costa Rica's most often visited parks, and delves into the commendable conservation effort that the country has made. The greater portion of the text is devoted to the natural history of four taxonomic classes. They are the amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals. Following an introduction to each class, including how best to find them, is a breakdown of its families, including a discussion of behavior, breeding, ecological interactions, and status. No doubt for reasons involving the portability of this guide, the author has chosen to profile only the species he feels the traveller will most likely encounter. For example, 214 of a possible 830 bird species are included. The second half of the book consists of 19 color photos of habitat and 80 color plates of the species profiled. Each class is painted by a different artist.

I can't imagine this book being of any direct use to the bander at work, but for anyone planning to travel to this easily accessible country, I would recommend it highly as an initial read. For those of us whose knowledge leans heavily on the avian side of the scales, this would prove a great asset for identifying and understanding some of the more common species of the classes of which we are less familiar. The plates and illustrations are very good, and the text both readable and informative. I should add that I'm sure that even the experienced Neotropical birder could glean much from this book. So, pack it with your "Stiles and Skutch" and your "Lonely Planet" to further

enhance your next trip to Costa Rica, a country that in the past few decades has arguably risen to the title of number one destination for ecotravellers.

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**A LITTLE BIRD TOLD ME SO [:] BIRDS IN MYTHOLOGY AND HISTORY.** Eleanor H. Stickney, 1997. Rutledge Books, Danbury, CT. Soft cover, xv + 269 pp. \$14.95 U.S.

This is a dictionary-style collection of biological, historical and mythological details on birds. Each entry of one paragraph to four and a half pages covers one or more aspect(s) of biological detail, derivation of the bird's name, folk lore, or religious significance of a particular species or group of birds. Although obviously researched thoroughly, the text is written in a chatty, informal style without references, and interspersed with several cartoon-style drawings. For the more scholarly reader, the text is followed by a list of references, an appendix and two lists of "native peoples mentioned in the text." The appendix is mostly a list of real and mythical people, but also includes a few groups of people (Cajuns, Druids, Inuit and Lombards) and at least one place (Scilly Islands). In short, this book is essentially a collation of avian trivia that should be of special interest to birders wishing to extend their knowledge of birds beyond mere identification. More seasoned ornithologists will also find numerous details on the influence of birds on human culture, details generally omitted from most biological treatises on birds.

Headings for some entries are followed by Latin species or genus names and/or length or range of length in inches of the species covered. Entries are alphabetical, usually by general name (e.g. Bittern) or, if on an individual species, by general name first (e.g. Bluebird, Eastern), but some are listed taxonomically instead. For example, Brant is placed alphabetically between Bowerbirds and Bulbul, not among other goose entries; whereas Cockatoo, White and Macaws are placed taxonomically between Parrot, African Gray and Parakeet, Carolina, rather than alphabetically. Similarly, two entries on *Turdus* blackbirds are

placed taxonomically with two other thrush entries; whereas bluebird, robin and wheatear entries are placed alphabetically between blackbirds and bowerbirds, roadrunner and rook, and waxwing and Whimbrel, respectively. Some species are also listed by groups not found in their names. For example, eiders, Gadwall, Mallard, Northern Pintail, scoter, teal, and wigeon are listed as "Duck, Eider," "Duck, Gadwall," "Duck, Mallard," "Duck, Pintail," "Duck, Scoter," "Duck, Teal," and "Duck, Widgeon," even though the word "duck" does not appear in the formal English names of any of these species or species groups. As there is no index or table of contents, readers should therefore be prepared to hunt around for entries that may initially appear to be absent.

As the author had been a licensed bird bander for 45 years at the time the book was published (p. vii), I was not surprised to find banding details in some of the entries. Jack Miner's Biblically inscribed bands are mentioned (p. 47) in the "Duck, Black" entry, although most of them were placed on Canada Geese. In passing, the same entry refers to one version of the frequently told "wash, boil, serve" story of wrongly inscribed bands. Her "Heron, Black-crowned Night" entry (pp. 93-94), includes the pioneering banding study of 1902 in the District of Columbia, and mentions recoveries of two of these birds in Cuba and Toronto in 1905 as being among the first banding "returns" [sic: recoveries]. In fact, the only 1902 bird recovered away from the colony was recovered in Maryland, the Cuba and Toronto recoveries of 1911 and 1910, respectively, coming from a larger group of herons banded in 1910 (P. Bartsch. 1952. *Bird-Banding* 23:59-60). Audubon's 1803 famous application of silver threads to the legs of four Eastern Phoebe nestlings and the subsequent return of two of them the next year is recounted (p. 166), as is the role of bands in locating the wintering grounds of the Chimney Swift (p. 213), although New Haven, Connecticut, is the only banding location mentioned for the swifts recovered in the Amazon. In fact, only one of the initial 13 bands recovered there was from Connecticut, the others being from Alabama, Georgia, Illinois, Ontario, and especially (eight) Tennessee (B. B. Coffey, Jr. 1944. *Migrant* 15:37-38). Longevity and long-distance records of banded Arctic Terns (p. 216) are also featured.

This book provides a fun read and a good introduction to the influence of birds on human culture. Readers wishing a more scholarly treatise on the subject should consult E. A. Armstrong's, "The life and lore of the bird in nature, art, myth and literature" (Croom, 1975), one of the references listed by Stickney. Although very interesting, Stickney's book is marred by an apparent lack of proof-reading or superficial proof-reading. There are numerous "typos" and errors in spelling, notably Chukkar for Chukar (p. 156), *Dendrogopus* for *Dendragapus* (p. 82), *Ecopistes* for *Ectopistes* (p. 168), *lectrus* for *Icterus* (p. 137), *Moticilla* for *Motacilla* (p. 233), *phoenicus* instead of *phoeniceus* (p. 9), *playcercus* for *platycercus* (p. 106), rectal for rictal bristles (p. 133) and *Salpinctus* for *Salpinctes* (pp. 247 and 248), and various miss-matches or inconsistent spellings of names of people and places. I filled nearly three pages of names of people or tribes mentioned in the text, but not listed in the appendix. A few other minor errors and misleading statements have crept in. After stating that Cock-of-the-rocks are "solitary," Stickney correctly indicates that males gather into leks (p. 23). Although Wood Buffalo National Park is partly in Alberta (p. 33), most Whooping Cranes breed in the Northwest Territories portion of the park. Crossbills, grosbeaks, finches, sparrows, and buntings are no longer considered to belong to a single family of birds (p. 33). Dippers are not unusual among birds in having a "third eyelid," (p. 40), but rather in their ability to use this membrane under water. There are not 16 species of Peregrine Falcon (p. 63). Presumably subspecies was intended. Harriers are not excluded from the Arctic, as they nest at Churchill, Manitoba. Nighthawks are not the only members of their family that fly south in winter (p. 132); other goatsuckers migrate south at least from the northern parts of their breeding ranges. Since tigers do not occur in North America, the Pueblo must have likened them to some other cat species (p. 148). Not all rail species are called "crakes" in Europe; nor are crakes restricted to Europe (p. 178). *Carduelis spinus* is not found all over the Northern Hemisphere (p. 194). It is very rare in North America, where *C. pinus* is widespread. Unfortunately, starlings have long colonized "frigid" parts of North America (p. 201), wintering throughout the Canadian prairies and even straying into Arctic settlements. Yellow spots

